Need for a Dialogue

Friends. I welcome all of you who have taken the trouble of coming here on my behalf as well as on behalf of the organisers of this gathering. We have a number of conferences, seminars, conventions and social and political meetings almost every day and press conferences are held from time to time for specific purposes. All such gatherings are convened either to let others know or to explain a certain point of view, but you have been invited here today for a frank, heart to heart talk on matters of mutual interest in order to understand each other and to create conditions of mutual trust and respect. My intention is that it should be a dialogue as if between the members of a family where the commitment to "togetherness" is always persistent. If the purpose of this dialogue is kept in view by all of us, I am sure it would lead us towards fruitful results. It is with this intention that you have been invited here.

A Dangerous Situation

Gentlemen : Disease is natural to human beings. It is natural for human beings to fall sick. In a way this is a sign of life. Similarly, it is human to err. Stones do not make mistakes, nor do the trees. Only humans make mistakes and anxiety or dejection over them is needless. It is not so distressing for history and destiny of mankind if a large section of the people goes astray and starts seeking material goods aud gets involved in a desperate pursuit of the lowliest ambitions. What is distressing is the sheer lack of people who would be willing to stem the rot, to fight against the

forces of disintegration and anarchy, at the cost of their comforts and, often, power.

History is full of instances when the society, faced with the threat from such evil forces, was almost on the point of extinction, when suddenly some people appeared who faced the situation with courage and conviction staking everything they had. The continuity of not only the human race but also of the human values owes a great deal to such people. Human sensitivities and sentiments, moral values and sublime goals, feelings of courage and sacrifice for preservation of these values, all owe their survival to such people who took up the challenge and faced the degenerate situation with a courage that changed the course of history.

Guarantee for Humanity's Survival

Human civilisation is alive thanks to these people only. The real guarantee of the survival of humanity lies in the existence of those few courageous and conscientious people who have hearts which bleed, eyes which shed tears and minds which are sensitive; people who would bear the hardships and would stake their lives to change the course of history. Whenever this class becomes scarce, the entire society faces extinction even though superficially it may appear to be healthy.

Cruelty and Injustice : Greatest Danger

The biggest threat to society (old or modern) arises when it gets prone to oppression and worse still, when the critics of oppression become too microscopic even to be counted on one's fingers—though there might be some who disapprove of the cruelty and oppression to the weaker sections but only in private. When those people become rare who would pronounce their disapproval of oppression publicly and oppose it tooth and nail irrespective of the risk involved, no power on earth can save a society. When oppression becomes the order of the day in a given society, when the yardsticks to identify the aggressor is his nationality, his community,

his language, his caste, a real danger looms large over humanity. When society gets divided into such compartments, and even in dealing with the aggressor, his religion, his community, becomes more relevant; when people reading about a riot in a newspaper first want to know the community of the aggressor of the victim, no power, intelligence, resources and planning can save such a society.

Verdict of History and Religion

Now, as a student of religion, history and morals I want to invite your attention to a few urgent problems faced by the country (which may be avoided by the politicians). These are extremely perilous and need our prior attention. One of these is the increasing proclivity to violence and disregard for human life, property and dignity in all sections of our society. We see it erupting time and again in the shape of communal disturbances and caste turmoils when entire families or even localities are made the target of most inhuman destruction. The same tendency to take recourse to violence is evident in the burning and killing of women for the sake of dowry.

All those who believe in any religion will not find it difficult to understand that the Compassionate and Merciful God, who is even more kind and loving to every man than his own mother, would not be pleased with these acts of wanton destruction. He will not allow this state of affairs to continue for long. He will not allow a society and the country to be prosperous no matter what efforts are made in other fields of life, if such things are allowed to continue unabated. The greatest reality upheld by all religions and creeds, next only to the existence of God, is that cruelty is the greatest sin and most destructive of all evils. Barbarity never goes unpunished even if there may be some delay in the divine retribution visiting the oppressor. No country or nation, whatever be its military strength, economic power or howsoever shining its literature and past accomplishments, can prosper with the heartlessness of its people.

Faith in Goodness of Man

Humanity's present and future, its cultural, economic, political and ethical advancement as well as all it thoughts and philosophies are dependent on the condition that man lives in peace; that he is not bothered about his safety, is aware of the worth of human life and attaches weight to man's dignity. The faith in man as the goal and objective of the world, as its most valuable existence, capable of advancing man to still higher levels of perfection, has moved the most virtuous and noblest sons of humantiy to devote their lives to the service of mankind. These great souls have stirred up the mind and heart of man to develop all those creative and intellectual, moral and social and spiritual and literary pursuits of which man has justly been proud. That the torch of humanitarianism has never been extinguished since the dawn of civilization is because the noble and the good have never lost faith in man; they have never taken him to be an irredeemable brute; they have never hated him; nor have they ever denied the right of his existence. This torch of humanity has remained aglow and can still be kept burning in the most adverse circumstances. History of human race tells us that many a noble soul has served it through self-sacrifice, by undergoing pangs of hunger and thirst in the shivering cold of hills and forests and under the scorching sun of the deserts. Nothing ever stood in their way, nor were they ever disheartened. The secret of their perseverence and unbounded enthusiasm was that they took man as the masterpiece of creation. They had faith in the goodnss of man and believed that his vice was transitory while his virtue was real, everabiding. They were convinced that their labour on man would at long last be rewarded. They had no misgivings about the fact that every bud in the garden of humanity had a right to blossom. Of a fact, there is nothing more dangerous and hateful than man getting despaired of his fellow beings. And it is still more horrible that his gloominess should drive him to dye his hands in the blood of innocent childern and

helpless women. That a man should not allow others to live and prosper is the vilest of all thoughts that can cross his mind. Peaceful condition providing protection to human life is the pivot on which revolve all human endeavours whether they be teaching and learning, reform and progress or political and economic stability. Maintenance of peace and order is thus the ultimate guarantee for making any progress or implementing plans and projects for it.

Truthful Men : The True Source of Strength

The real sources of power and progress for any country are those honest and truehearted men who do not beat about the bush in condemning the evils like injustice and oppression even in times of greatest emotional stress. If you want to estimate the inner strength of any nation and its potentiality to safeguard its heritage and culture, you would have to find out the number of men who waste no words in criticising the mistakes committed by their own people and government with the least care for the numbers or power or administration. These are the men who come forward as protectors of the weak and the oppressed and are willing to undergo any hardship for their holy cause. They do not have an axe to grind nor they desire to derive any benefit by being shrewd and artful. They prefer to be truthful even at the cost of losing their popularity. These are the men who put their lives at stake for upholding the values of humanitarianism, brotherly love and charity even when the whole nation is overflowing with the venom of malice, hatred and intolerance. They make no distinction of colour, class or creed in protecting life, honour and dignity. If you find adequate number of such persons in any nation, then there is no cause of concern about its future. It will overcome every difficulty and make up every shortcoming. Its enemies will become its friends and it will be able to make its mark of moral superiority in the comity of nations. It will, without the least doubt, prosper as a strong and self-reliant nation whose

voice will be heard with due regard and whose aid will be sought in solving international problems.

Two Uucorruptible Classes

Whenever human race passes through a phase of moral degradation or comes under the cloud of the forces of disintegration, two classes come to the fore, one, the intellectuals, and the other, the religious people. These two classes are the last to succumb to corruption. This is what the history tells us. And this in what appeals to common sense also. And once corruption afflicts these two classes, then God save the society.

India has reached a stage where the educated, the intellectuals and the scholars of our universities and seats of learning need to come out in the arena. The field now belongs to the intellectuals, the religious people and those selfless workers who have nothing to do with political parties and political ambitions. They do not bother which particular political party would come to power and would get hold of the reins of government. There are instances in history when the time for reward came and the government was being offered on a platter to the people who had worked for a change,but they flately refused to accept it saying that they had worked only with sympathy, sincerity and concern and only for pleasing God, and, therefore, they do not want any reward.

A Dangerous Turn

I can tell you without being apologetic that I have studied history. I do not think Indian society has ever been under a threat of this magnitude as it is experiencing today. I would not hesitate to say that Indian body-politic has faced mutilation many a time, has suffered defeats, and has been subjugated by the foreign rule of the British but the soul of India, and her conscience had never been weakened so much as to stop working altogether.

There was never a phase in Indian history when evil and oppression was tolerated so meekly as it is being done today, to the point of retionalising it, and using it as a tool to strengthen cadres, parties and as a raison d'etre for the different political parties in India. India has faced hundreds of calamities but its conscience has always remained alive and has never stopped its function.

I am afraid that the heart that beats may not stop functioning,
Since beating alone is the reason for its existence.

The Living Conscience

I shudder to think if the Indian conscience is dead. What can be a bigger danger than not finding a single compassionate man who would hear the cries of the oppressed and come out into the field.

Leaders, political parties, seats of learning and libraries, speakers and orators, intelligentsia, nay, geniuses may all be there but where is the conscience which would shed tears on this degeneration of society and humanity ? Humanity has survived because of this conscience and not by swords and arrows, armies and militia men, royal treasures and abundant wealth, nor by the advancement of education, science and technology. It was always the human conscience which prevailed over all these, and created resources where there were none. Imagine what a poor man can do when his heart aches and he is restive. On the other hand, there is one who has all the resources but has no anguish and has no will to do anything. Time passes and he does nothing.

My apprehension is that the conscience of Indian society is presently faced with that inertia. It has stopped doing its work. This is a cause for alarm, since the future of humanity is dependent on it; whatever good or advancement is expected is dependent on it. Whenever this conscience wakes up, it receives a divine light which is kindled by the prophets. It does not succumb to power or wealth,

and it achieves what big empires and huge armies fail to achieve. You must see how conscience of some which were alive and virtuous, have done their job in their times. After all what did the holy man have ? What were their resources ? But they created a new society, a new social order.

The Lowest Ebb

Today the moral degeneration has reached its lowest ebb. When a man meets an accident it is an occasion which stirs the whole neighbourhood into concern and action. People gather around him. Mothers come out of their homes leaving their chlidren behind. Someone brings water, another brings medicine saying that this brother of ours was somewhere and has met with an accident. Today the moral degradation has reached a level where people remove the watches from the hands of the crushed, mutilated corpses and search their purses. Today instead of putting drops of water on parched, thirsty lips, people start helping themselves with their valuables. If you had read about these incidents in history books you would not believe them. People in other countries would not believe them. But we see many such train accidents. People in a nearby village see a man lying buried under the debris, his body caught between two logs. He begs them to take everything and free him. But they snatch the watch from his wrist and the money from his pocket and leave him dying. What can we expect from a society which has become so cold-blooded. Can anything about such a society be pleasing ? Can it be expected to survive and play a leader's role in the world ?

I have often mentioned that a traveller is returning from Bombay with little savings and fond hopes. He has heard that his mother is sick and as soon as he reaches home he will bring medicine for her. She would be happy to see him and would feel rejuvenated. He has hardly left the station when he is stabbed. There his mother lies groaning in pain, here he lies dead. In a society where such things happen, can any progress whether economic, political

or educational, be a matter of pride? Even if the number of universities becomes ten times of the present number even then the society has no reason for happiness, contentment or pride. Even if the educated are fewer but they are the types who hate oppression, sin and corruption, that society is alive, and strong and may possibly lead other nations.

Clarion call by an Intellectual

I would seek your permission to cite here a portion of the Presidential Address delivered by Dr. Zakir Husain Khan, the then vice-chancellor of the Jamia Millia, Delhi, and who later rose to the President of India, on the 17th November, 1946, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Jamia. The meeting was graced by the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the President of Indian National Congress, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, members of the Interim Cabinet and eminent leaders like Sardar Patel, Raja Gopal Acharya, Mohammad Ali Jinah as well as the cream of India's scholars, educationists and social workers. It was the time when communal riots had broken out in Delhi and cases of stabbing were being frequently reported in the press. As the dates of the Jubilee celebrations had already been fixed and could not be postponed, elaborate security arrangements had to be made for the invitees. This extract is still relevant today.

> "You are all like the stars in the sky of Indian politics. Millions of our countrymen revere and adore you. I would like to take the benefit of your presence here to say a few words on behalf of men like me who have dedicated their lives to the cause of education. The way our country is going in flames it seems a mad venture to keep on doing our work. How can we grow new flower plants in a land which is scorched by a fire destroying all noble traditions of humanitarianism? How will the new flowers of goodness and moderation blossom here? How can we inculcate human values amidst this beastly behaviour? How will the servants of humanity come forward in these

conditions and how will they be able to carry on their noble work among the beasts and savages? My words would perhaps sound a bit harsh to you but in the conditions overtaking us, even these hard-hitting words appear to be too soft to express my feelings. We, whose profession makes us give due regard to the sentiments of young people, do not have words to express our feelings when we hear that even small children are not safe in the spreading wickedness. The Poet of India had said that every child born on this earth brings the message that God has still not despaired of man. But, has the despondency of man in our country reached the stage where he wants to decimate the budding flowers? For God's sake sit down and decide how to extinguish this fire. This is not the time to find out who fed the fire or how it came about. The fact is that the country is on fire and you have to put it out. This is not a question of keeping only our nation safe and alive, it is a question of choice between the civilized way of life and the devilish disorder : for God's sake do not allow the foundation of civilised behaviour to be destroyed in this country."

Need for self-criticism

It is really unfortunate that generally those who come forward to do anything in this connection feel shy of doing anything to reform or to set their own community straight which is undoubtedly a difficult task. Instead, they take the easier course of tendering advice to other communities or putting the blame on others.

Reconstruction of character and intellectual attitudes of any people, integration of different sections comprising the nation in a genuine and equitable manner and making the country safe from the sword of Damocles hanging over its head needs much more courage and probity. But, it is

regrettable that today we find very few persons who have the courage to speak out the truth without any fear or favour and it is perhaps our greatest shortcoming as well as a sign of danger also. The situation at present is so extraordinary and dangerous that we cannot rely on usual appeals in the name of morality or on the government machinery. What is required now is to arouse the conscience of the nation for the sake of God and higher values of humanitarianism which, I believe, still have a place in the heart of God-fearing and softhearted people of this ancient land. But this would need those dedicated souls who are willing to stake their lives and to postpone all their pursuits for it.

Criminal Negligence

We have to do a bit of heart-searching and find out what we have done to educate the people about the ultimate goodness of human nature, love of fellow-beings and the value and worth of human life. Have we launched any country-wide movement for these ? We had certainly made sacrifices for the attainment of independence, struggled long against the British Imperialism which had, on the one hand, created a longing for freedom in every heart and, on the other, made the foreign rulers leave this country. This made our dreams come true and the country became independent. But we should not feel shy of admitting the fact that we have not put in the same amount of effort for arousing the conscience of the people against communalism as we had for stirring up the masses for winning independence. We made the people hate the injustice of the British rule but not to take aversion to every form of injustice. Even today we are not devoting even a half or one-fourth of our energy for the reconstruction of the nation that we are spending to reconstruct the country. And the result is that there is a country, but not a nation. We are today not prepared to allow anyone to grab an inch of our land, and this we must do; but we are ever willing to inflict an injury to our own body, ampute

our own limbs, destroy our own houses and indulge in fratricide.

Need of the Hour

Nothing can be achieved without a hard struggle and making sacrifices for it. The reconstruction of the nation by inculcating the dignity of mankind and creating mutual trust and confidence among the people needs toil and trouble. Today India is standing on a crossroad of history. It is a crucial moment for it. One of the ways before it leads to destruction, disorder and decay. Another path leads to peace and amity and unity and co-operation. There are always people, who at the crucial moments of history change the course of events and shape the history of nations. Their courage and trueheartedness saves the country and the nation from ultimate destruction and thus they are the builders of their country in a true sense of the word. But these are the people who are normally found outside the governments and political parties, in the ranks of selfless servants of the country. They are men of spiritual perfection whose intentions are above every doubt, whose truthfulness is not disputed and whose past has no black spots. But, if these classes, too, become self-seeking, fhen there remains nothing to be salvaged and the ship of that nation becomes fated to go down the sea for ever. The intellectuals and the truely religious men know the dangers of hatred and animosity, malice and unkindness among brothers. They know how God deals with such a people, and the ultimate fate of such a nation. It is, therefore, natural that they are more worried than others when they see the symptoms of wickedness in their society and come forward to its rescue. I need no apology to cite here a verse from tha holy Quran which depicts the picture of such a corrupt society and urges upon the enlightened and deep-hearted persons to reform it.

> "If only there had been among the generations before you (deep-hearted) men possessing a remnant (of good sense) to warn (their people) from corruption in

the earth, as did a few of those whom we saved (from destruction) ! The wrongdoers followed that by which they were made sapless, and were guilty".

(Q. XI : 116)

Four-fold Programme

Now, the current situation in the country is definitely disastrous and likely to portray us as an uncultured and uncivilized people to the outside world. It needs the best of qualities possessed by the intelligent, well-disposed and benevolent persons who love their fellowmen to launch a comprehensive and long-term programme of reform and regeneration in the country. I suggest here a four-fold programme which needs to be given attention by all the altruistic persons and leaders of our public opinion.

(1) A mass contact movement based purely on humanitarian, moral and religious values for making an appeal to the people is utmost necessary. The people have to be personally contacted in every village and ward. Meetings should be held at all these levels to educate the people about the ultimate goodness of human nature and the value and worth of human life, honour and property in order to urge upon them to understand their responsibility in this regard. It is necessary to make a moral and religious appeal to the people since the people of our country are inherently peace-loving and religious in temperament, and it would be easier to reach their minds and hearts in this manner. This course is suggested, first, because the effect of such an appeal would be more enduring and, secondly, because the people are losing faith in political policies and programmes oft repeated on the occasion of elections only to be adandoned thereafter.

(2) Revision of curriculum particularly that relating to history, from the primary to the university stage, and exclusion of such material which sows the seeds of

discord in the minds of student is essential. Since the things taught at an early age get imbibed in the minds of children (especially when the teachers become its protagonists) the entire course of their lives get changed. The poison of communalism thus spread in the society takes the form of emotional hysteria and results into communal riots from time to time. Unless this curriculum which was devised by the Britishers to further their own ends of divide and rule is reformed, there can be no hope of peace and mutual trust between different sections of our society.

(3) Indian Press should also make a sincere effort to realise its responsiblities. What these papers normally do is to publish sensational news and one-sided versions so as to hold one-community responsible for the riots. Thus, they try to create misunderstanding and hatred against one section of the people. As I had advised the Editors of Urdu Newspapers sometimes back on the occasion of an Editors' Conference, held at Lucknow, that one slip of pen by them can cause thousands lives to be lost and many villages and towns to be ravaged.

(4) The police organisation was a British creation primarilly for maintaining its hold over India and to coerce the people into submission. It was only natural that this organisation was trained to disregard all human and moral values and traditions with the result that high-handedness and imperious behaviour became its chief characteristic. But now, in free India, its objective should be service to the people rather than domineering over them. This important organisation whose members are drawn from our society should now be trained to serve the people. It should take a compassionate view of those who are in distress and perform its functions with a greater moral sense. This is the role allotted to the

police in all other free countries including even Great Britain.

I have not at all exaggerated the horrible situation obtaining today, althought I would request you to excuse me for presenting the facts squarely in a straight way. But I feel so disconsolate about the situation that I would have been perhaps more outspoken in presenting these facts if it had been possible for me to do so.

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

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